

### ***What is an "Advance Directive"?***

An Advance Directive is a document you create to maintain control of your health care decisions should you become mentally or physically unable to make those decisions yourself.

### ***How many kinds of Advance Directives are there?***

Basically, there are two:

a. A "Living Will" is a written document allowing the withholding or withdrawal of life-sustaining medical care such as cardio-pulmonary resuscitation (CPR), mechanical ventilation, or dialysis.

b. A "Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care", abbreviated here as DPAHC, is a written document designating the person (such as your spouse, relative, or friend) whom you trust and whom you want to make medical decisions for you. You are delegating this surrogate only the authority to make health care decisions for you. You are not delegating any authority to enter into contracts or assume financial obligations. You can additionally designate an Alternate to the DPAHC, should the person you originally select as the DPAHC be unable, for whatever reason to perform the duties you are requesting.

### ***Why should I create an Advance Directive?***

An Advance Directive document preserves and protects your rights by allowing you to specify how your medical care decisions are to be made should you become unable to make them. Having this legal document will help guide your physician in carrying out your wishes. An advance directive only takes effect if you are unable to make these decisions yourself due to your current mental condition.

### ***What kinds of health care decisions are likely to be considered?***

Your decisions will determine whether you receive all appropriate treatments, some treatments, or only treatments to make you comfortable. Examples of treatments likely to be considered are the extent of resuscitative efforts should you stop breathing or should your heart stop beating, use of artificial breathing machines for ventilation, use of artificial kidney machines for dialysis, blood transfusions, transfer to an intensive care specialty unit, artificial food or fluids administered through a tube into your stomach or into your veins, and a variety of diagnostic tests, procedures, or medication treatments which could potentially have significant side effects.

### ***How should I make my decisions on whether to accept these various treatments?***

You should use your values and what is important to you. For example, avoiding pain and suffering, enjoying the company of friends and loved ones, or the avoidance of being a burden to your family. Imagine yourself in a coma or with permanent brain damage or terminally ill -- and then ask yourself if it is important to you to prolong life regardless of pain, chances of recovery, or emotional burden on your family. You should discuss these responses with your family or friend as well as your doctor.

### ***Why can't my doctor just make my health care decisions for me?***

Your doctor needs to understand your values and preferences. Some people would choose to withhold or withdraw life-sustaining treatment if the chance of recovery is small. Other people would choose to undergo life-sustaining treatment regardless of the degree of pain or suffering.

### ***Do I have to create an Advance Directive?***

No. The choice is completely up to you. There is no penalty should you decide not to create such a document.

### ***Do I have to decide right away?***

No. The intent is that you consider these options when there is sufficient time to think and discuss them with your family and friends.

### ***Who can help me complete the paperwork necessary to create an Advance Directive?***

After you have discussed your decision with your physician, your VA nurse, social worker, or chaplain can assist you in completing the required paperwork.

### ***What information will I need to supply to complete the Advance Directive paperwork?***

Other than your own name, address and social security number, all that would be needed would be the names, addresses and phone numbers of those you choose to designate as your DPAHC and the Alternate.

### ***Who can create an Advance Directive?***

Anyone who is over the age of 18 years and is of sound mind (possesses decision-making capacity) can create either of the advance directives.



***Who can serve as a witness to my signature?***

Your physician, nurse or close relative may not serve as a witness. In general, the witness should be a friend although a VA social worker or VA chaplain can witness your voluntary signing.

***Does it have to be notarized?***

No. The two witnesses are sufficient to document your signature.

***Do I need a lawyer or a clergyman?***

No. There is no requirement to consult either of these people, but you may wish to discuss it with them if you value their opinions.

***Once I create an Advance Directive what do I do with it?***

You should keep the original Advance Directive with your personal papers, but a copy of it should be given to your physician, nurse or social worker who will ensure that it is attached to your medical record. You should keep extra copies at your home. If you have selected a surrogate decision-maker then that person should receive a copy.

***When does an Advance Directive take effect?***

The Advance Directive takes effect only when you cannot make decisions for yourself such as should you be in a permanent coma or suffer irreversible brain damage or be terminally ill with no chance of recovery as attested by two physicians.

***So, I can still make medical decisions even after completing an Advance Directive?***

Yes. The Advance Directives are only used when you are not able to express your own choices.

***Can my family go against my wishes?***

No. The Advance Directive you prepare now will speak for you to guide your physician in the event that you cannot speak for yourself. If you designated a person to speak for you then that person will speak for you.

***What if I change my mind?***

You can revoke the Advance Directive at any time by simply notifying your physician that you no longer wish to have an advance directive and the paperwork is so marked. You may wish to change or modify some or all of your treatment preferences and this involves completing a brand new form. Any copies of the old Advance Directive should be located and destroyed.

**Call: Who can I contact for more information or to ask questions?**

The physician, nurse or social worker caring for you can answer many of the questions that you have. Information can also be obtained by calling:

Chaplain Service office at extension **7125**;

Consumer Affairs office at extension **7883** or **7884**.

Chairman of the Ethics Committee at **7011**.



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